Ham: a Virginia Tradition

Virginia is famous for its hams. The Smithfield ham, which has to be made in the town which bears its name, is known worldwide.

These hams are covered with salt, dry cured in salt and other cure ingredients, smoked and dried. They usually are soaked and simmered before baking and cooked to 155 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

There are a variety of cured pork cuts available, said Virginia Tech Extension specialist in food technology Norman G. Marriott. Each has a specific definition. Here are some of them.

Fresh ham is from the hind leg of pork which has not been cured or smoked. Therefore it looks and tastes more like a pork roast than ham. Fresh ham sould be cooked to 165 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

Cured ham is from the hind leg of pork which has been subjected to a liquid or dry cure formulation which contains salt and other cure ingredients. It is the most frequent type of cured pork found in the grocery store and is usually labled as "ham." Cured ham should be cooked to 155 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

Country ham has been produced by using a dry cure, with or without sugar. It is made with a slow smoke, if smoke is applied, and a long drying process. These hams are salted heavily and usually require soaking before cooking. Country hams frequently are referred to as "Virginia Country Ham," though other states which produce them use their names too. Country ham should be cooked to 155 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

Country-style ham possesses the same qualities as country ham but it is not produced in the country. "Virginia Style Ham," for example, indicates it was produced outside the state. This ham may require soaking before cooking, and should be cooked to 155 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

Hickory-type smoked ham is one which has been smoked by hanging over burning hickory chips or sawdust in a smokehouse. It may not be labeled "hickory smoked" unless hickory wood shavings, or sawdust has been used. This product should be cooked to 155 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

Honey-glazed ham is a cured and smoked or canned ham which contains a glaze of honey, sugar and spices. For cured and smoked hams, the glaze is applied during smoking. Fruit garnishes also may be put on the ham. The glaze is applied before processing canned hams and the honey-glazed flavor tends to permeate the ham.

Ham with gelatin added, is label information found among canned hams. They contain gelatin to help hold the boned ham together during shipping, storing and slicing. Gelatin is added in a dry form before the can is sealed and cooked. The gelatin is intended to thicken juices drawn from the meat to fill the air space. Since canned hams are cooked fully they may be served cold or heated to 140 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature.

There are other cured pork products, said the faculty member in Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

A picnic is a shoulder cut of pork which has been cured in the same manner as ham. It may be canned and fully cooked. Otherwise it should be cooked to an internal temperature of 155 degrees Fahrenheit.

Smoke picnic is a shoulder cut of pork which has been cured and smoke in the same manner as ham. It should be cooked to an internal temperature of 155 degrees Fahrenheit.

Smoked butt is a shoulder cut of pork which has been cured and smoked the same as ham and is usually boneless. A smoked butt should be cooked to an internal temperature of 155 degrees Fahrenheit, Marriott said.

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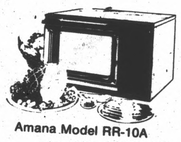

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Keep them outside

Give house plants a summer break

As summer approaches, make plans to give house plants a vacation outdoors.

"Most house plants seem to benefit from being outside during the warmer months," said Virginia Tech Extension specialist in home horticulture, Diane Relf.

The transition from indoors to outdoors should be gradual to avoid problems. Sudden changes in environment can be disastrous to many topical plants. They can be injured severely if the temperature drops to 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

It is best to wait a full month after the last killing frost before leaving the plants out overnight, said the faculty member in Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

A gradual change in light intensity also is important. Winter-weary house plants easily can be sunburned if exposed to sudden, intense light.

"Start by placing the plants under trees and slowly move them to the setting with the optimum light for the particular species," Ms. Relf said.

Very few plants will ever want full, bright sun, though the variegated plants generally require slightly more light than solid green plants of the same species.

Helen's Ripe Cucumber Pickle

Peel seed and cut cucumbers in strips.

For 7#

Mix 1 cup lime, 1 gallon water; Pour over cucumbers and let stand overnight. Rinse cucumbers in cold water; then cover with cold water and let stand for 3 hours. Drain and cover with the following:

1 tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon celery seed
6# sugar
2 quarts white vinegar

Mix well and pour over cucumbers. Let stand overnight. Boil all together for 35 minutes or until clear and brittle. When almost done, add 1 teaspoon of tumeric dissolved in 2 tablespoons of the syrup for color. Place in jars and seal.

Many things to Helen Scott for sharing this delicious recipe with us.

Decorate room with fragrance

A beautiful room, which is a delight to the eye, can have an extra portion of allure for the nose.

No matter how imaginatively color-schemed or splendidly rich with accessories, a delicious fragrance is a special thing that adds the extra excitement to a beautiful decor, said Virginia Tech Extension specialist in home furnishings, Katherine L. Hable.

Here is a recipe for "potpourri" which can be made from the products in a home flower and herb garden, or from ingredients purchased at a pharmacy.

4 cups rose petals
1 cup mixed mignonette, pink, heliotrope, lavender blossoms
1 pinch each bay, marjoram, cedar chips, balsam
1 teaspoon each whole cloves, freshly ground mace, broken cinnamon stick
½ teaspoon each crushed coriander and cardamon seeds
1 tablespoon powdered gum benzoin or storax
a few drops of brandy, oil of patchouli, sandalwood or vetiver
½ cup lemon and orange peel, slivered and dried

All flowers should be gathered early, before the dew vanishes, stripped into petals, and allowed to dry gradually. After the petals are entirely free of moisture, mix in the other ingredients with a wooden spoon or a glass rod. Let it season a few weeks. Store in a covered jar.

"It can be opened again and again whenever the occasion is appropriate," said the faculty member in Tech's College of Home Economics. "Or place the "potpourri" in small jars and give as special gifts.

3-Day Cucumber Pickle

NOTE: Cut up cucumbers in late afternoon. This makes it run out right to make up in the morning.

7 lbs. cucumbers, sliced thin (about 5 slices to an inch)
2 cups lime
2 gallons cold water

Put water in large container. Stir in lime, mixing well until all lumps are dissolved. Put cucumbers in and let set 24 hours, then drain thoroughly. Wash twice in cold water, cover with ice cubes for 3 hours. If you do not have enough ice cubes to cover the cucumbers well, add water enough to cover. After 3 hours, drain through colander.

Spice Mixture:
2 quarts vinegar
4½ lbs. sugar
1 tablespoon salt

Tie spice in cloth and drop in the above mixture. (Pickle spices may be used, or if you don't use pickle spices, use cinnamon, cloves, all spice and ginger to taste.) Soak in the above solution overnight. Next morning boil **Gently** for 40 minutes. (**Boiling gently is very important** as the pickles can be ruined by boiling rapidly.)

How to make dill pickles

Pack in each quart jar either whole, speared, or sliced cucumbers.

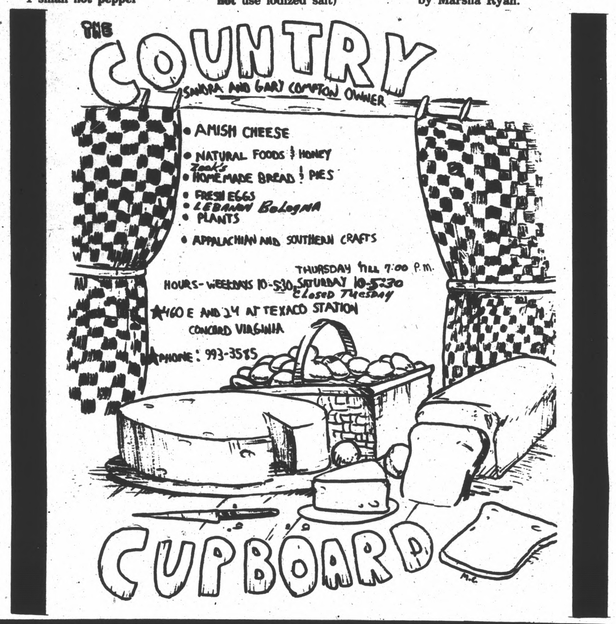
To each quart use:
1 dill weed or 2 teaspoons dill seed
1 teaspoon mustard seed
1 small hot pepper
2 bay leaves
2 small garlic cloves

Bring the following to a boil and pour over each quart:
3 cups vinegar
3 cups water
5 tablespoons plain salt (do not use iodized salt)
½ cup sugar

If processed, they are ready for use immediately.

If not processed, let set for 3 months before using.

This is Leah Carter's mothers recipe shared with us by Marsha Ryan.



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